



DATE: August 26, 2019

AGENDA ITEM # 2

## AGENDA REPORT

**TO:** Historical Commission

**FROM:** Sean Gallegos, Staff Liaison

**SUBJECT:** HPA19-0001 – 210 Alta Vista Avenue

### RECOMMENDATION:

Approve a recommendation to the City Council to authorize the City Manager to execute a Mills Act agreement with the property owners for 210 Alta Vista Avenue

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### BACKGROUND

#### Application History

On October 24, 2016, the Historical Commission held a public hearing and recommended that the City Council approve a request to designate the barn at 210 Alta Vista Avenue as a Historic Landmark. The Commission discussed the merits of the request, noting the physical integrity of the barn, and its unique and rare architectural style. Following the discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council approve designating the Ames/Landels barn as a Historic Landmark at 210 Alta Vista Avenue.

On January 24, 2017, the City Council held a public hearing and unanimously adopted Resolution No. 2017-02 designating the barn at 210 Alta Vista Avenue as a Historic Landmark. The City Council Resolution No. 2017-02 designating the barn at 210 Alta Vista Avenue is provided in Attachment B.

On November 27, 2017, the Historical Commission reviewed and recommended approval of a historic alteration permit for rehabilitation of a barn to repair and upgrade the structure, including replacement in-kind of roof, and restoration and preservation of the barn form, architectural features and materials. Since the significance of the property is related to the exterior features of the house, the historical evaluation found that the exterior work was in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

#### Historic Assessment

The barn was constructed when the rural-residential development of Los Altos was intensifying after the Peninsular Railway spur was constructed and the downtown established. The barn is an excellent and rare example of the English Gambrel style, which was employed for wood frame barns in the West starting around the turn of the twentieth century.

As outlined in the Updated Landmark Assessment Report and Updated Historic Property Evaluation (DPR 523A and 523B) prepared by Leslie Dill of Archives and Architecture (Attachments C and D, respectively). The Landmark Assessment Report found that the recently completed rehabilitation project, including the repairs, restoration techniques, and alterations to the barn met the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties – Rehabilitation Standards. The barn and its setting continue to maintain its historic integrity to convey an authentic representation of its historic significance.

After the rehabilitation and exterior alterations, the barn maintains its original location within the former farmstead of the William and Harriet Ames and the Edward and Helen Landels family. The barn remains centered in a small triangle of land originally formed between the peninsular railway and Adobe Creek, and now between Foothill Expressway and the creek. The immediate setting has been preserved with its character defining naturalistic appearance.

The barn's compact gambrel-roof form, unpainted wood siding and wood shingle roof have been preserved or replaced in-kind. The building continues to have the exterior appearance of a balloon-famed structure; however, the structure now includes concealed steel elements. The roof's shallow eaves with exposed rafter tails and skip roof sheathing have been preserved or restored in-kind. The exterior walls continue to be clad in vertical, unpainted redwood board-and-batten siding. These character-defining features are in keeping with the original design, materials, artisanship of the historic building.

After rehabilitation, the property continues to maintain its historic integrity per the National Register's seven aspects of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The barn maintains its original *location* within the former farmstead of the Ames/Landels family. It sits in a preserved immediate *setting* surrounded by a grove of mature oak trees and bounded by the natural riparian habitat along Adobe Creek. Although some of the barn's exterior has been altered by the installation of new windows in original openings and the by installation of differentiated French doors at a previously altered wall, the building has obvious visual integrity with its vernacular English Gambrel Barn *design*. The preservation or replacement-in-kind of its character-defining features, as well as the preservation of the visual aspects of its historic structure, represent the era's *workmanship* and use of *materials*. It's original character-defining materials have been preserved or replaced in-kind, including its roof form, hay hood and angle brace, skip roof sheathing, board-and-batten siding, board doors with strap hinges, window sizes and locations, and second story loft within the roof. The small barn continues to embody *feelings* of a rural twentieth-century family farm and continue to illustrate the property's *associations* with the Ames/Landels family and patterns of early Los Altos development.

The barn continues to embody the significance according to California and Los Altos criteria as presented in the 2016 historic resource evaluation report and historic property evaluation (DPR 523) prepared by historian Leslie Dill. The barn at 210 Alta Vista Avenue continues to qualify for Historic Landmark designation at the local level and is eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources under Criteria 1, as it is associated with significant historic patterns of growth of the City of Los Altos, and Criterion 3, as the structure embodies the distinctive characteristics of an early-twentieth-Century English Gambrel Barn. The property's 2016 historic evaluation report is included in Attachment E, and the Updated historic evaluation report and DPR forms are provided in Attachments C and D.

## DISCUSSION

The City of Los Altos currently has 13 Mills Act agreements for properties located in Los Altos. The Mills Act provides for a reduction in property taxes for qualified historic properties. The Act represents a current use assessment for qualified properties, also known as a contract assessment. The property owner must enter into a preservation agreement, which allows the owner to enjoy a reduced property tax rate from the County Assessor in exchange for the preservation, and in some cases, restoration and rehabilitation, of the historic structure. The County Assessor sets the property tax rate based on an appraisal of the market value of the land and improvements related to the historic structure. A property under an agreement will receive a property tax reduction based on an appraisal of the rental value of the land and improvements related to the historic structure. In accordance with Municipal Code Chapter 12.44.170, the City Council may approve Mills Act agreements as an incentive for preserving historic properties.

The standard term of a Mills Act agreement is for ten years with an automatic renewal clause each year. It is important to note that, both parties have the option to exercise their right to revoke the agreement should they desire to do so at a future date. The agreement also includes a requirement that all money saved on property taxes must be invested into the preservation, restoration and/or enhancement of the historic structure. A schedule of improvements to the structure and property has been included as Exhibit B in the draft agreement (Attachment F).

Based on the findings in the evaluation, the Ames/Landels Barn continue to be architecturally significant, according to state and local criteria, and remain significant historic resources and would be appropriate for consideration of a Mills Act contract.

Cc: Katherine and Oswald Cuervo, Applicant  
Greg Evard, Architect  
Leslie Dill, Historian  
Cuervo Family Revocable Trust, Owner

### Attachments:

- A. Site Map
- B. Resolution No. 2017-02
- C. Updated Historical Background and Architectural Evaluation Report, Urban Programmers
- D. Updated Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Primary Record
- E. 2016 Historical Background and Architectural Evaluation Report, Urban Programmers
- F. Historic Preservation Agreement